

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 TUNIS 00709 302130Z  
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 ONY-00 /011 W  
-----093005 302145Z /65-R  
O 301650Z JAN 78  
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9767

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 0709

STADIS//////////

FOR ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY SOBER FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: ELAB, PGOV, TS  
SUBJ: FURTHER ASSESSMENT OF TUNISIAN SITUATION

REF: STATE 22426

1. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO ASSESS DEFINITIVE EFFECT OF  
JAN 26 DISTURBANCES ON TUNISIAN PEOPLE POWER STRUCTURE.  
PRIME MINISTER WILL GIVE HIS FIRST FULL PUBLIC STATEMENT  
TOMORROW; OPPOSITION LEADER AHMED MESTIRI YESTERDAY WAS  
STRONGLY CRITICAL OF GOVERNMENT AT PRESS CONFERENCE (SEPTTEL;  
AND WHETHER AND HOW ACHOUR'S SUPPORTERS WILL REACT TO HIS  
ARREST REMAINS TO BE SEEN. THERE IS CONSIDERABLE UNPREDICTA-  
BILITY IN PRESENT SITUATION, EVEN FOR CHIEF ACTORS, SINCE LAST  
WEEK'S EVENTS ARE QUITE UNPRECEDENTED IN HISTORY OF INDEPENDENT  
TUNISIA. IN NEXT FEW DAYS WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO PROVIDE A COM-  
PREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT. IN MEANTIME, I WILL ATTEMPT TO ANSWER YOUR  
SPECIFIC QUESTIONS IN ORDER THAT YOU RAISE THEM.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF CURRENT VIOLENCE AS IT RELATES TO TUNISIAN  
DOMESTIC SCENE. WHATEVER ELSE IS IN DOUBT, THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT  
THAT TUNISIA WILL NEVER BE QUITE THE SAME AGAIN. WHEN NOUIRA  
REPLACED TAHAR BELKHODJA AS MINISTER OF INTERIOR, IT BECAME CLEAR  
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PAGE 02 TUNIS 00709 302130Z

THAT HE HAD DECIDED ON SHOWDOWN WITH UNIONS. RESULTS MIGHT HAVE  
BEEN DIFFERENT HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR IRRESPONSIBLE AND INCOMPETENT  
LEADERSHIP OF GENERAL STRIKE. HOWEVER, THIS DOES NOT ANSWER  
QUESTION OF WHY SOME YOUTHS IN TUNIS (TOTAL NUMBERS UNCERTAIN)  
TOOK TO STREETS SO READILY AGAINST THEIR GOVERNMENT. NOUIRA HAS  
EMERGED THE STRONGER PROVIDED--AND THIS IS IMPORTANT--THERE ARE  
NO FURTHER WIDESPREAD DISORDERS. GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, HAS ALIENATED

A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE POPULATION, EVEN THOUGH IT HAD LITTLE CHOICE IN FIRMLY PUTTING DOWN DISTURBANCES. IF NOUIRA AND HIS LIEUTENANTS NOW SEEK RECONCILIATION AND SHOW A DISPOSITION TO GET AT THE ROOT OF SOCIAL DISAFFECTION THAT HAS BEEN REVEALED, TUNISIAN DOMESTIC SCENE MAY BE HEALTHIER THAN BEFORE. IF, HOWEVER, HARDLINE ELEMENTS IN GOVERNMENT CONCLUDE THAT REPRESSION IS THE WAY TO DEAL WITH TROUBLEMAKERS, OPPOSITION TO GOVERNMENT MAY TAKE MORE ACTIVE FORM. OUR BETTING AT THE MOMENT IS THAT WHEN THINGS HAVE COOLED TUNISIANS WILL AGAIN DEMONSTRATE THEIR USUAL GOOD SENSE AND MODERATION.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF VIOLENCE AS IT RELATES TO US INTERESTS IN AREA. IF NOUIRA CAN REMAIN IN POWER WITHOUT USE OF HARSH AUTHORITARIAN METHODS OUR INTERESTS WILL BE LITTLE AFFECTED. EVEN IF GOVERNMENT BECOMES MORE AUTHORITARIAN, TUNISIA WILL PROBABLY STILL REMAIN MORE DEMOCRATIC THAN ITS NEIGHBOR'S, AND THERE MAY BE LITTLE REAL EFFECT ON US STRATEGIC INTERESTS. IF NOUIRA PROVES UNABLE EITHER TO MAINTAIN INTERNAL SECURITY OR KEEP MAJORITY OF TUNISIANS WITH HIM, AT SOME POINT BOURGUIBA MIGHT REPLACE HIM. IT VERY UNLIKELY THAT ANY POTENTIAL SUCCESSOR TO NOUIRA CHOSEN BY PRESIDENT WOULD BE ANYTHING BUT PRO-WESTERN. IF, HOWEVER, BOURGUIBA WERE TO DIE WHILE SITUATION SHAKY, THERE COULD BE DAMAGE TO US INTERESTS. EVEN THEN IT UNLIKELY THAT ELEMENTS UNFRIENDLY TO U.S. WOULD GAIN POWER.

4. ALLEGATIONS OF LIBYAN INFLUENCE OR MONEY IN CURRENT SITUATION.  
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PAGE 03 TUNIS 00709 302130Z

THERE MAY WELL HAVE BEEN BOTH, AND GOVERNMENT, WE ARE TOLD, WILL SEEK TO DEMONSTRATE THIS ONCE SITUATION HAS COOLED DOWN. FOR PRESENT, HOWEVER, IT OBVIOUSLY NOT PRUDENT FOR GOVT TO STIR UP QADHAFI UNNECESSARILY. IT IS WORTH ADDING, HOWEVER, THAT FACT THAT UGTT OR EVEN CABINET MINISTER HAD RECEIVED FUNDS FROM LIBYA DOES NOT NECESSARILY DEMONSTRATE EXISTENCE OF A PLOT. KNOWING AMOUNT OF MONEY THAT QADHAFI IS SPENDING WORLDWIDE, IT WOULD BE SURPRISING INDEED IF HE HAD NOT SPENT LARGE SUMS IN TUNISIA. WHETHER SUCH DISBURSEMENT BOUGHT HIM ANYTHING OF VALUE IS ANOTHER QUESTION. ON THIS POINT GOVERNMENT WILL, NO DOUBT, HAVE ITS DAY IN COURT.

5. WILL TROUBLES SUBSIDE OR COULD EVENTS LEAD TO CIVIL WAR? CIVIL WAR QUITE UNLIKELY. GOVERNMENT SEEMS TO BE IN FIRM CONTROL AND PROBABLY WILL CONTINUE TO BE IF IT BEHAVES PRUDENTLY. MILITARY LEADERSHIP STILL UNLIKELY TO MAKE ANY BID FOR POWER. FURTHER ATTEMPTED STRIKES OR DEMONSTRATIONS COULD BE DEALT WITH UNDER STATE OF EMERGENCY, WHICH PRECLUDES PUBLIC GATHERINGS. IT IS PROBABLE THAT BOTH POLICE AND ARMY SUPPORT OF GOVERNMENT STRENGTHENED BY LAST WEEK'S EVENTS, WHEN NEED FOR LAW AND

ORDER SHOWN SO CLEARLY. WITH EACH PASSING DAY PROBABILITY THAT NORMAL SITUATION WILL BE RESTORED INCREASES. HOWEVER, SHOULD THERE BE FURTHER WIDESCALE DISTURBANCES THIS WOULD INDICATE A DEGREE OF POPULAR DISAFFECTION THAT WOULD PLACE TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT IN VERY SERIOUS TROUBLE INDEED, AND WE WOULD EXPECT PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA TO REPLACE IT. AT THIS POINT, WE SEE ODDS HEAVILY IN FAVOR CONTINUATION OF NOUIRA GOVERNMENT AND GRADUAL RETURN TO NORMAL CONDITIONS. HOW MUCH BITTERNESS REMAINS DEPENDS ON SKILL AND WISDOM OF GOT IN HEALING WOUNDS. WE THINK THEY CAN DO IT.

6. UNLESS THERE IS SOME OBJECTION, WE WOULD PLAN TO SEND THIS STADIS MESSAGE TO OTHER INTERESTED ADDRESSEES  
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PAGE 04 TUNIS 00709 302130Z

MINUS FIRST AND LAST PARAGRAPHS.  
MULCAHY

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## Message Attributes

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